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Housekeepers' Chat

U. S. Department of Agriculture
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Not for Publication

Subject: "How Much Chicken in Chicken a la King?" Information from Food and Drug Administration, U. S. D. A.

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This morning I am going to ask a special favor of every homemaker who listens to my radio talks. Do you have a good recipe for Chicken a la King? Will you please write it down, and send it to me? Thank you kindly.

No doubt you are wondering why I want so many recipes for Chicken a la King, and why I don't have one of my own. As a matter of fact, I do have a recipe. A very good one it is, too, but I want several hundred more.

I shall give them to the Veteran Inspector of the Food and Drug Administration of the U. S. Department of Agriculture. Perhaps you heard the Veteran Inspector's talk last Monday, about poultry, and poultry producers, and Chicken a la King, and how unscrupulous dealers might get us, if the government didn't watch out.

Let me tell you a story the Veteran Inspector told me. The scene of this story is New York, the greatest chicken-buying city in the United States. A certain dealer in dressed chicken decided that he would increase his income by increasing the weight of his chickens. Since chicken is commonly sold by the pound, the heavier birds would naturally bring in more money than the lighter ones. What to do with the lighter birds? Add to their weight, of course. Fill them up with ice. The dealer inserted a small rubber hose into the bodies of the dressed chickens, ran in some water, and let it freeze. This increased the weight and brought more money to the dealer. His trick was very hard to detect, because the chickens were either cooked soon after purchase, or put upon ice. Evidently those who bought the poultry did not weigh it after purchase. When the chickens were cooked, the excess weight went off in steam.

The dealer was caught, eventually, by a Food and Drug inspector who suspected a trick, and kept close watch. The dealer had to answer to the law for a violation of the Federal Food and Drugs Act.

The Veteran Inspector told me another story -- about a barrel of dressed poultry which was shipped to New York City from a state in the Middle West. The barrel of poultry was adulterated in that it contained a part of a chicken which was diseased, or otherwise unfit for food. The United States attorney for the southern district of New York, acting upon a report by the Secretary of Agriculture, asked for the seizure of the product. The barrel of adulterated poultry was destroyed by the United States marshal.

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You probably know that it is illegal to ship from one State to another foods or drugs which are adulterated, misbranded, or unwholesome. Government inspectors are constantly on the watch for violations of the pure food law. The Federal Food and Drug Administration continuously maintains a nationwide supervision over interstate shipments of all poultry products, both dressed and canned.

Canned poultry products are comparatively new. Only within recent years has it been possible for the city housewife to go to the store and buy, in can or bottle, half a chicken, a whole chicken, chicken chow mein, chicken meat, chicken broth, deviled chicken, chicken a la King, and a number of other chicken products. The chicken-packing industry is growing fast.

The Department of Agriculture is keenly interested in this growing industry. Officials from the Food and Drug Administration are constantly on duty, inspecting the canned chicken products, and doing all they can to see that you and I get pure and whole foods for our tables.

The Bureau of Agricultural Economics, an important Bureau in the Department of Agriculture, has drawn up a set of minimum requirements as to the wholesomeness of such products. When a packer complies with the government's regulations, he is allowed to print these words on the label of his product: Inspected and Certified by the Bureau of Agricultural Economics, United States Department of Agriculture.

These words on the label are a guarantee that the chicken used in the manufacture of the canned product was carefully inspected under federal supervision. Do you know what that means? The Packer or manufacturer whose chicken products are labeled with these words has a trained veterinarian, right in his factory. This veterinarian inspects every bird; for signs of disease. Any birds found unfit for food are destroyed. I am becoming more and more convinced of the vast importance of reading labels.

The Veteran Inspector showed me a list of more than a dozen packing plants which have this Federal inspection service. The next time I buy canned chicken I'm going to read the label, and see whether it contains these important words: Inspected and Certified by the Bureau of Agricultural Economics, United States Department of Agriculture. If these words are on the label, I know it will be perfectly safe to use the chicken.

Now, let's return to the recipe for Chicken a la King. The Food and Drug Administration wants to see that you and I and thousands of other women buy only pure, wholesome products. The Veteran Inspector told me how we can help the Administration, and I'll tell you how. Take Chicken a la King, for instance. What is Chicken a la King? Chicken, and cream, and mushrooms. Correct. But how much chicken? Five per cent? Ten per cent? Twenty-five per cent? Different packers put different quantities of chicken in their Chicken a la King.

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The Food and Drug Administration is going to draw up a set of minimum requirements for good canned Chicken a la King. So let's you and I tell the Administration how much chicken we think is a good proportion. The Administration gets along very nicely with its staff of men, but you notice that when it comes to recipes, we women have to help out. You probably have a favorite recipe for chicken a la King. If you will send it to me, I'll give it to the Veteran Inspector. He will send all these prize recipes to his friends in the Food and Drug Administration in Washington, D. C. They will study the recipes, and use them in drawing up a set of minimum requirements for good canned Chicken a la King. Perhaps your recipe will become the government standard of excellence for Chicken a la King. At any rate, we can help out considerably by sending in our recipes. I thank you kindly.

Friday: "For Easter Dinner - Crown Roast of Lamb."

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